



ACHIM SZEPANSKI 2022-09-03

THE HYPERREALITY OF WORK

ECONOFICTION CONSUMER, HYPERREALITY, LABOUR, LABOUR POWER, MARXISM, PRODUCTION

Above, I argued that until the 1970s, social mediation through labor was characterized by an interdependence of capital and labor. This was based on the fact that capital, in its urge to exploit, was dependent on living labor, while the owners of the commodity labor power depended on the successful sale of this very commodity in order to be able to live. In the epoch of fictitious capital, however, this relationship has changed fundamentally. Not only has mass living labor been made superfluous by the Third Industrial Revolution, but more crucially, the

focus of capital accumulation has shifted from the utilization of labor power in the production of commodity market goods to the anticipation of future value. As a result, capital has become self-referential in its movement toward an end in an entirely new sense. To be sure, the anticipation of future value, which is capitalized and accumulated in the here and now, remains within the logic and form of commodity production; for it is, after all, generated by the sale of a commodity, namely, by the sale of a property title that certifies the claim to a certain sum of money and its multiplication. But the sellers of these property titles are by no means any laborers who sell the promise of labor performance in ten or twenty years, that is, who received a kind of long-term advance, the redemption of which would remain uncertain; rather, it is the functionaries of capital themselves, primarily the banks and other financial institutions, who sell to each other the securitized claims to future value, thus generating and accumulating fictitious capital. In this respect, then, capital has in fact become completely self-referential; the commodity representing additional social capital is created within the sphere of capital itself.

Conversely, however, this now means that the sellers of the commodity of labor power largely lose their bargaining power. Not only can they be replaced at any time by machines or by cheaper competitors somewhere in the world in view of the advancing development of productivity and globalization; what is even more decisive is that their commodity is no longer the basic commodity of capital accumulation. This results in a structural imbalance. For the vast majority of the world's population, social mediation through labor is still central insofar as they have to sell their labor power or their labor products as a commodity here and now in order to be able to participate in social wealth in return, i.e. to buy the means of consumption they need. On the other hand, capital, too, remains related to the social mediation through labor; for it has by no means taken leave of the universe of commodity production. To the extent that capital accumulates by anticipating future value production, that is, anticipates the results of possible labor in the future, it frees itself from its dependence on the present expenditure of labor power and the sellers of the commodity labor power.

2.The Phenomenology

And labor is everywhere, at all times. When oppression is absolute, there is no more leisure, no more "free time." Sleep is supervised. The meaning of work is then the destruction of work at and through work. But if, as it happened in some concentration camps, work consists in dragging stones to a place at a run, piling them up, and then, still running, bringing them back to the starting point ... Then work can no longer be destroyed by any sabotage, if it is already destined to destroy itself. Nevertheless, it retains its meaning; not only to destroy the worker, but, directly, to occupy him, to fix him, to control him, and at the same time to give him the consciousness that producing and not producing are one and the same, are also work ... Maurice Blanchot on the labor camp.

Isn't today's situation somewhat similar? There is a large number of meaningless and even from a capitalist point of view unproductive occupations in the mostly precarious labor relations, which Graeber calls bullshit jobs, and which, whether they are connected with long waiting in which nothing happens or with unbearable work hustle, run complementary to the ubiquitous circulation logic of capital (the main thing is that the work circulates as employment); The

affectively occupied, lightning-like speed that one has to cultivate in dealing with digital devices and media is often also expected in dealing with people, objects, and matter, and this attitude, if it is paid for, is now disguised as employment. Nonstop-doing is hip and hip, even if it is still the very last nonsense that is carried out, at least a little spiritual profit should spring from the occupation, for which the rampant hobby sector from the hardware store to the nudist oasis, the boom of therapeutic wellness and leisure activities with their patchworks of self-enhancing activities and the spiritual feel-good industry from tantra to yoga to Thai chi provide the affective stepping stones, although monetary profits from such activities are usually only mediated. Industrial labor was always also about employing the worker (as variable capital), whose value of his labor power was never identical to the work he performed that created surplus value for capital. Today, however, the employee (not the worker) is more and more often no longer primarily the owner of a labor power composed of assets, skills, qualifications, and potentials, which the owner offers on the labor market and rents out for a certain period of time, thus functioning as a producer who, in addition to performing (surplus) work guaranteed by his labor power, still exists as a leisure person. As a modern consumer of labor or as a customer of labor (at the employment agency for labor), on the other hand, the employee today is considered as human capital in 24/7mode or as a holder of a self-portfolio to be filled up with professional, social and emotional competences (not qualifications) and to be constantly improved, developing a sense for favorable opportunities and options in jobs and virtually accepting opportunity speculation, so that the employee, translated into the language of economics, can be regarded as a constantly improving conglomerate of various small types of capital; indeed, the employee is this conglomerate, which he must credibly embody for the employment agency as a customer by providing evidence of small securities documenting his employment history and ability. As a consumer of labor, he is at the same time the small capital x that he, as a speculative competence conglomerate, is obligated to increase in his alleged non-interchangeability or singularity, at least that is what the neoliberal imperatives say, but in doing so he always remains a profile ascribed to him by companies, social media, and employment agencies, a product oscillating between consolidation and versatility. At the same time, the consumer remains involved in a volatile work process (training for job), which at times is even called "life." Hand-wringing, as far as it has reached a certain status, the competence conglomerate searches for its always refreshable talents as well as for a unique selling proposition, which of course lies in its (never to be actualized) potential to embody it once in the distant future, while it nevertheless remains entirely subject to the techniques of the pluperfect of an "it will have been", techniques which continuously transform the future into the past.

Wage labor today must endure a particular paradox. On the one hand, work is a universal virtue that inscribes itself in life.... Everything has become work, be it body work, relationship work, sex work, grief work, etc. Truly free time thus becomes a condition to be avoided at all costs. On the other hand, the importance of work as a profession and vocation is diminishing, so that only the job and employment remain, whereby a working life is often enough regarded as the accumulation of the next best opportunity, without the chance to be able to tell one's employment biography as a successful life (Sennett). Furthermore, fewer and fewer people have access to a job that provides them with a reasonably comfortable existence. And finally, the fear

of unemployment hangs over almost everyone who sells his or her labor. Then we would have to ask why people do not understand their bullshit jobs as such.

Basically it has to be said that Marx replaced the subjectively oriented concept of alienation later in *Capital* by the concept of the extraction of surplus value, which one does not experience subjectively so easily, because the separation of necessary labor and surplus labor is not visible. However, surplus value is necessarily evoked by the capital relation.

In place of the producer, who in the course of capitalist history had emancipated himself at least for certain phases of life from his internment in the factory as well as from the complete lack of rights in matters of freedom, who thus at least possessed the freedom to offer his labor power on markets, today increasingly the employee or the consumer of “labor” takes his place, who is chained to it day and night. While the potential producer on the labor market embodies a supply as labor power, the consumer of labor represents the embodied demand for the agencies that mediate labor, whereby labor power is permanently designed and traded, coached and cast on the labor markets; it now becomes the flexible mode for the business model of a labor design industry that prescribes permanent casting for labor power. And even if today the producer still spends his labor power, it tends to be stripped from him insofar as he no longer defines himself solely through an act of production, but moreover as a consumer of labor through an act of purchase. And the less nowadays, in view of automation and the excessive increase of bullshit jobs, the necessity of work can still be conveyed to the employees, the more the demand for work is supposed to congeal into a ubiquitous model, which also means that the potential producers are put into the role of consumers of “work” via the job centers and the various private placement services.

Gerburg Treusch Dieter has meticulously gone through this process. The job center does not receive producers, but consumers of labor. Baudrillard: “The same is true for work. The spark of production, the violence of its challenges no longer exist. Everyone still produces, and more and more, but in a subtle way, work has become something else: a need (as Marx ideally considered, but by no means in the same sense), the object of a social “demand”, like leisure, to which it is equal in the general distribution of life. The demand is exactly proportional to the loss of engagement in the labor process. The same peripety as with power: the labor scenario is there to hide the fact that the reality of labor, the reality of production, has disappeared.”

Today, the flexible labor market is largely characterized by the precarious service offered, among others, by the Federal Employment Agency, which, however, can actually provide employment only if it is available, which is also assumed without further ado. Consequently, the unemployed must be responsible for their own unemployment, which in turn implies that they are mostly lazy or redundantly unwilling subjects. If one invalidates this assertion with facts and figures, then nothing remains but the lack of work. And it is exactly this lack of work that the Federal Employment Agency must constantly deal with as its “service on the labor market” by miraculously transforming the missing work into work in potency. And assuming further that the work is in many cases precarious and underpaid work, with employees either potentially hounded and bullied to death or subjected to pure occupational therapies, the absence of work will never be absent.

To repeat, the Federal Labor Agency defiantly maintains that there is no lack of work, making the lack of work itself work. No matter what work is offered by the agency, it now seemingly circulates itself as a potential commodity (the classic misrecognition consisting in the confusion or equation of work with labor power), but one that is usually updated only for a limited time, although even the potential participation of customers in the search for work has long ceased to be a guarantee that current participation in work will result from it. When the unemployed mutate into customers of state or private employment agencies, this is precisely where another reversal comes into play: the unemployed, who are by definition producers without work, potentially become consumers, buyers of work. It follows that the unemployed, as demanders of labor, are at the same time the entrepreneurs of themselves, apparently buying their own labor. In any case, they have their small capital X to increase, and since this, apart from their potency to be labor power, is mostly zero, the Bundesagentur auf Arbeit one day came up with the clever idea to improve this small capital X, password "Ich AG", but more or less quickly abandoned this effort. The precarious employee should now experience on his own body what responsibility and entrepreneurship means, so that he finally identifies with the sacrifices that state and capital make for him, in order to release the state apparatuses and companies from their legal and social responsibility.

The act of buying work must be repeated quite frequently by the precarious worker in the course of his working life, so that factors such as training, performance potency, knowledge acquisition and improvement of qualification and competence are made permanent, which consequently gives rise to a proliferation of consulting, training and continuing education services in the labor and coaching markets. Here we are dealing with the logistification of an employment mobility regime, which consists in placing the right amount of workers, with the right skills and qualifications, in the right place at the right time and at the right cost, for which there must be a permanent tracking of the movements of the workers, in order to meet this kind of just-in-time production, and this also concerns in particular to-the-point migration, (Logistic Borderlands 54), in the management of which a logistics of waiting times, comprehensive monitoring, control and prevention of frictions are required.

The knowledge acquired mostly at the screen results in a fluctuating information value (of the consumer of labor), whereby this consumer has little to do with the labor force of a classical producer, who is confronted with a site-bound machinery constructed for a specific production. The new paradigm of employment is the computer, mobile and flexible and integrated into a network. To be successful today, one must be networked in almost all professional areas, as this is the only way to attract investors who will promote and advance one's human investment capital. Seemingly well-informed by the purchase and application of affective and social skills, as well as professional knowledge that has sprung from consulting, coaching and training programs, the consumer of labor must be absolutely capable of the flexible and attractive sale of himself, precisely by constantly acquiring some kind of assets, namely certificates, deeds, appraisals, work contracts, time vouchers, tax breaks, etc., which he must present, as well as his ID card, at every performance.

Labor continues to be spent in some professions, but its symbolic value, represented by the fought-for right to work, has been largely eliminated. In its place, then, is the informational value

of the consumer of labor, characterized by coaching skills, the value acquired through education and training, the performance-self portfolio, and the genetic code. In this fourfold connotation of the information value, there is the small capital x that covers the information processing of the competencies and the purchased knowledge when selling oneself. Now it becomes apparent whether the consumer of labor functions as a self-informing network or not. The act of purchase is then carried out via the recognition of the assets, provided that the consumer of labor has an attractive information value (and possibly also the necessary purchasing power). And should his assets then be updated by an employment contract, then he is sufficiently mobilized as a temporary worker for employment. Assets, like all financial assets, contain a potency, but here it is merely actualized as a participation in labor or employment. If an asset is then also updated, then everything must be accepted as work, because unreasonable work does not exist according to the Federal Employment Agency. If, however, the updating of one's own information value does not succeed, the market pronounces the verdict that says: The creation of work through its absence failed.

Temporary employment puts the permanent emergence (and disappearance) of jobs on a permanent basis, with which nothing more than unemployment is supposed to disappear, so that temporary employment knows interim periods without work, but precisely no more unemployment. In these interim periods without work, in turn, the assets circulate without interruption in the form of applications through the private and state agencies, because although temporary work is limited in time, the application period is not, so that the assets circulate on the labor market for years or almost the entire life, but they are not lost years, because the assets that are traded by the agencies (allegedly) always serve to improve their own information and competence value. It should now be clear that the consumer of labor is a risk subject, and if he sells his information value invested in assets below value for a while or even forever, then that's just his bad luck, because of all things there are no insurance claims in the "loan and temporary work game with profit and loss".

And to take it further, unemployment assistance is a right only if the right to work is presupposed. It was fought for by the producers and their organizations in long class struggles with reference to the world-forming potency of the industrial labor power, which today is stripped from the consumer of labor, which actually also eliminates the right to unemployment assistance and was ultimately consequently transformed into Hartz4, which resembles a panic laboratory with an alms (which introduces criminal law into social law), for the self-inflicted misfortune, which actually only falls to the one, who considers every work mediated by the "modern service on the labor market" as unreasonable. The Hartz4 recipient has no business on the official labor market, where there is a highly qualified, academic, privileged wage-earning class, i.e. the secure core workforce of large and medium-sized companies and the partly self-employed and at least phasewise well-earning precariat. The rest of the population is in the low-wage sector or maintains itself at the level of state-subsidized and/or state-enforced employment or falls out of employment altogether, which only increases the unhappiness. Part of the superfluous remainder is meanly still relegated to forced labor as Hartz4 recipients, in which employment itself is the marginal income, since a basic income independent of work continues to be strictly rejected. Forced labor means permanent mobilization for work. And there is one more thing to be pointed

out here: The sharply delineated division between employment and unemployment (unemployment as the flip side of employment), which goes back to a quite different accumulation regime (standardization and continuity of production, consequently stability and continuity of employment), has been transformed into an ever closer interlocking of periods of employment and periods of unemployment. That unemployment has become structural does not mean that millions of people are waiting for a permanent contract; rather, they are working while simultaneously registered as unemployed. Unemployment is now part of the norm of employability. To be unemployed is to be available and immediately employable, not for a permanent contract, but for a temporary contract with a term. (Lazzarato)

When larger parts of work, specifically unskilled work, are not allowed to be completely decoupled from income, they become service, which consists not in the work itself, but in the subjection to work commanded by the state. As such, service today is service to labor, expressed in compulsory labor. This is de facto service to labor. And the less the service is still service to work, the more it mutates into service to competence and information by means of absorbing, processing and storing it. In the process, the information migrates into the body and its cognitive faculties and tends to become identical with the service (performance). The demand for work, which is objectively lacking, becomes the demand for what takes its place, it becomes the demand for what replaces work: competence, information, automation and digitization. Therefore, more and more powerful software must be available to interconnect the data and information flows with the bodies, the affects, and the brains of dividends, where they are literally imprisoned by the control, regulation, and feedback processes encoded in the digital programs, because a traceability of every single action and the anticipation of further actions is built into the circulating logic of the information flows.

The transitive normalization of behavior, that is, the full integration of actors into systems in which they function merely as points in networks to be recorded and exploited, is supplemented quite peculiarly by the consumption of the offerings of the enhancement industries, which in turn make it possible to make use of all the forces of self-enhancement in the pull of performance activities like a service. Here, the competence, fitness and wellness status acts like “systemic doping” that provides any number of positive placebo effects. To the same extent that the new consumer of work, who tends to be unemployed, affirms his unemployment as the completion of a service, and continuously appropriates his precarious appropriation on his own responsibility, the blackmail immanent in the classic employment contract seems to be lifted, as if there were an endlessly creative and performatively applicable work capacity out of nothing, as if the service provider were the reincarnation of the deification of positive work and competence. This also reflects the fact that the loss of work for dividers today appears as a catastrophe that must be averted with all available means – when no one believes in work anymore, only then will the belief in its necessity become universal. If Marx could still state quite dryly that the worker does not produce for himself but for capital, in order to really exclude any apotheosis that elevates work to the status of an idol, then with the creative self-configuration through the purchase of work, which is stylishly accompanied by the constant consumption of coaching, casting and enhancement programs, a truly uncanny enjoyment of (digitized) work is rediscovered, whose propagandists constantly trumpet that the people integrated into the informing networks are

actually the embodiment of creative sharing and singularity performances – instead of simply admitting that these people are still mostly command receivers who may be giving each other orders in the team at a lower or middle level of the company. The measure of effectiveness in the team is the power of the group over the individual. Employees start to control and criticize each other – or they help each other to get the job done despite adverse circumstances, often at the expense of their own free time and health. This leads to an enormous work intensification and extension of working hours, far beyond the collectively agreed or even legally permitted working hours. These are self-organized teams that are given few guidelines on how to perform their work, but still have to meet the profit expectations set by the companies. Management is handing over more and more responsibility to employees, but still wants to maintain control over them. To do this, they now control indirectly by setting up a so-called environment to which team members should and must respond in an entrepreneurial manner. Market structures are now artificially mapped in the company: Employees are organized into semi-autonomous corporate units, business units and profit centers, each of which must assert itself in the internal and external markets of the company. In this way, it is enforced that they use the criterion that applies in capitalism as the yardstick for evaluating the meaning of their work: profit or cost savings. Gradually, workers assume some entrepreneurial functions.

Labor, which is increasingly disappearing as industrial labor (in the metropolises), remains as a scarce commodity and as employment administered as both amphetamine and tranquilizer. As a consequence, work, which is in fact no longer work but employment, which consists either in waiting or, alternatively, in the worst kind of hustle, must be given a special kind of gloss, namely it is rewritten as self-realization and self-enhancement, a euphemism that not only those, a euphemism, which not only those, which came once into the benefit of a measure of the job center, but also those, which pursue a completely normal job in the office – a frightening Konvulsion from Mobbing, agitation and paralyzing boredom at the same time, as sense-empty busyness – only as a bad joke to understand can. If they don't, and if they show even the first signs of delinquent behavior, then today's data science engines extract data and signals from the Web and other sources that indicate precisely this deviant behavior, and this quickly turns them into a work risk that is classified on a risk index, so that the company and its management can take preventive action and simply throw the personified risk out the door. Because most employees do not do the deviating, they have to consume their own employment as a punishment as a self-fulfillment project, the maximum punishment that capital has in store for subjects beaten up in this way, who are even denied work in the sweat of their brow. And such consumption of work today often enough resembles the scrapping of work, so that even the imperative of work is omitted, because the new Stachanows of vulgar hedonism and affective competence no longer need orders to do whole work (on themselves) and for the others, they only need the emotional and empathetic breath, the push that the coach or leader constantly instills in them.

And this punishment continues in leisure time; as is well known, the seriousness of life – inseparable from the fun of life – begins in leisure time, in which not only the conglomerate of products, affects and events, but consumption in the loop wants to be consumed. Terms such as leisure industry, wellness center, leisure pedagogy and the like indicate that leisure belongs to

business, with leisure and work vying with each other for the highest recognition, so that in life it is no longer just a matter of having worked as much as possible, but also of having consumed or enjoyed as much leisure time as possible within the framework of supposedly highly individualized worlds of experience. This is especially true for the elites and the high-income part of the middle class, who, as if dissolved in their delusion of singularity and excess of uniqueness, constantly mix leisure and work and place both under the glamour of creativity, people who are all around happy with their kind of singular self-enhancement, while the larger part of the population, even in the feel-good oases of the West, can only tolerate the vagaries of daily occupation, in order to somehow get to the most precious weeks of the year and to enjoy the vacation, that is, to loiter in some hotel bunkers in the south, that is, to be under the supervision and guidance of professional specialists, coaches and entertainers who teach you day and night how to dance, to do gymnastics, to eat and to have intercourse. Wolfgang Pohrt writes in this regard: "The hard fact that the capital relation, in accordance with its historical purpose, transforms wage laborers into superfluous human material, into useless eaters who can be left to starve in poor countries, while in rich countries they must be kept halfway happy as recipients of support. this hard fact is thus treated with a lot of ideological fabric softener, and at the end of the fabric softener wash, which some call rethinking, others call label swindling, the simple time killing, for example, has turned into self-responsible identity finding, just like the cleaning woman to the room attendant at that time. " Pohrt a touch of mink.¹⁸⁶

And when even the left wants work, which in hip circles has long since been called creative work, to be understood for the last time as the self-realization of the individual, then one is not at all in the neighborhood of Marx, but rather one is in the maelstrom of the philosophy of life of a youth movement that can't be gotten to death, which, in turn, in the maelstrom of being sucked up within a pool of "interesting options," relies on permanent enforcement of cultural novelties, with which the bloated self of upwardly mobile little bourgeoisie can afford the illusion of uniqueness, in neuspeech singularity, distinctiveness and genius, something that the specimen deprived of all power absolutely needs today in order not to have to visit a life-therapeutic specialist against the daily suffered mix of paralyzing boredom and stressful occupation, who puts two and two together, namely that creative work must also be added to beautiful living, well-groomed drinking and healthy eating, otherwise one cannot be happy and satisfied, but remains the meaningless hedonist, against whom, it must be added, no one has warned one. And so the freedom to create something new out of supposedly nothing is combined with the compulsion to be constantly creative in the various attractiveness competitions, and the more everyone has to be creative, the less the individuals are able to do it, but because they continue to try frantically, a world of pseudo-originality, fakes and plagiarism is created, which shows one thing above all: That despite the millions of inventions and the abundance of goods with alleged uniqueness, there is nothing left to invent. And the faster the object decays today, the more it has to be spruced up with a creative idea, from the creative fruitcake to the creative wall decoration to the creative self, which can be multiplied on the labor and attention markets as the small capital x, invested or simply bought from a consulting firm. However, it does not come here, as Seeßlen/Metz think, to the destruction of old meanings and to their replacement by new meanings, which they call surreal, but the energetically produced surplus of meanings refers solely to the fact that it must be

meant, what is meant is completely indifferent. But still every meaning must be capitalized. In the process, even the less fragile concepts of life and work fray today at the omnipresence of the incisions with which life, employment, and the generation of surplus are ever more rapidly divided into intervals beyond a chronological time, pressed and scattered again or recombined, and thus continuity is replaced by a kind of indeterminate postponement – truly a persistent state of suspension of a speculative time, with which the never-endingness of lifelong learning and investing is also perpetuated. There is an ever-deepening fragmentarization of working time and living time, and both times remain locked into the process of frenzied, deterritorializing recombination, in which, for example, work can be retrieved for a week, a day, or an hour, making employment fractal and recombinant. Digital labor is fragmented; the dividend – itself a divided and cellular form – undergoes a recombinant fragmentation in cellular and at the same time recombinable segments in the digitized production processes. The point here is not only that labor itself becomes precarious, but that divisions, in some circumstances the dissolution of the person as a unified productive agent, as a labor power, continually occur in the labor processes. It is quite clear, as cells of productive time, dividers can be constantly remobilized, stimulated and recombined in the punctual and fragmented forms of labor processes. We are dealing with an immense growth of depersonalized working time, insofar as capital is increasingly moving from hiring the worker who works eight hours at a stretch to hiring various time packages in order to recombine them just in time (out- and crowdsourcing) – and this precisely independently of their interchangeable and thus more or less random carrier. The “self” now also fluctuates as a fluid residual ego and is recombined in ever new relations, and this formation resembles a kaleidoscope “that shows a new pattern every time it is shaken.”¹⁰ This kind of spasmodic recombination of employment, which extends far beyond work relationships, is also performed today in the various social networks. In the mastery of accelerating and decelerating, stretching and postponing, compressing and resetting schedules, extended possibilities are also produced for workers to generate surplus for financial capital with non-chronological flows of money. The preconditions for this kind of surplus generation, which goes hand in hand with debt, are both low wages and precarious forms of work in which workers must constantly adapt to unpredictable work schedules and to volatile wages, not least to leveraging their debt so that they are virtually sucked into undetermined and unpredictable flows of time.

In turn, in the share economy, digital interfaces, now called platforms, control and steer work in an entirely restructured labor market. For example, the drivers and bicycle couriers of new platforms such as Uber differ from the dependent employees of traditional companies in that they themselves offer a service, whereby the means to perform the service that an app of the platform conveys to them must be raised by themselves, be it the car or the bicycle and in any case the smartphone. So what is worn out during the execution of the service is the property of the drivers and couriers. In this process, the drivers, whom Uber, for example, allows to pick up passengers, are under strict digitalized control and are also spatially forced to follow the algorithms of the platform. Indeed, the routes they drive are dictated by GPS, while their efficiency, availability, as well as their interaction with passengers are subject to constant evaluations, which then continue to determine how, when, and where drivers are deployed. In this context, drivers and couriers do not act as official employees, but are private contractors

vis-à-vis the companies of the platforms. Far from offering an alternative to precarious work, those who ultimately provide the service to customers oscillate between the restrictive conditions of wage labor and the risk of self-employment. Thus, the service providers who use the platforms' offerings are exempt from the repressions of wage labor, but also from the social guarantees that accompany it (because the platforms do not pay social security contributions). In this way, they seem to represent the epitome of neoliberal subjects. At least the personal dependence on a boss who sweetens the working day with all kinds of orders disappears, because the drivers have little to do with the organizers of the platform, even in an emergency it is hardly impossible to contact them. So it seems that it is up to the drivers themselves how they organize their working day, but they must never be too slow during work and they absolutely have to keep up with the competition, so it is simply a matter of pedaling come what may. The companies always increase the hourly wages for the most effective of their drivers a little bit, but this means nothing else than that through the permanent monitoring and automated evaluation of the drivers' performance, the competition, comparison and scaling are ensured in the long run. Thus, in the case of self-employed drivers, earnings are measured by the number of deliveries made. And this usually also increases the willingness to take risks while driving and thus, as if by the way, the drivers' demand for accident insurance benefits; the rising insurance premiums reflect the courage to take risks, which in turn spurs the drivers' performance, because they also have to earn the money for accident insurance. If no orders are received during a shift, the drivers do not get paid, but their working time is transformed into free time. But because the couriers can't do anything with this free time, and don't want to – who wants to eat their way through the paralyzing time mash of everyday life – not only are the really stressful shifts the most popular with the self-employed drivers, but they also constantly ask for new shifts. As a rule, drivers reliably clear the market and, due to their own lack of financial resources, they constantly request new shifts, thus increasing the demand for courier jobs, which is why the algorithm can worsen the financial conditions for its users with every update, but this does not lead to a noticeable drop in demand.

For many theorists, the large platforms are nothing more than the assemblage of commercial contracts between a "principal authority" that contracts on behalf of the company and a multiplicity of agents that independently provide services to the companies. The platforms thus multiply partnerships based on purely commercial encounters, on the basis of which services are provided to third parties without regulated employment contracts and wage workers. (As before, however, it is almost impossible for a number of companies in various industries to produce without hiring wage workers). Finally, however, the new service providers depend not only on their own performed labor but also on their involvement in networks structured by ratings and rankings and other ordering procedures, and this also means that the exploitation of their labor resources and their risk management ultimately depend on the credit favored by positive ratings, the accumulation of which they must necessarily succeed in. Therefore, their own work performance as well as the promotion of their skills in the course of self-marketing constantly requires positive evaluation and recognition by customers, which manifests itself in scores, likes, friends and followers, and optimizing these evaluations is an important task for a driver to accomplish. And the accumulation of "reputational capital" must necessarily result in an efficient

credit score in order to gain the trust of banks and insurance companies as well. The sustainability of the operations of service providers thus depends much more on the approval of lenders and sponsors than on the entrepreneurial ethos brought to the fore by neoliberal ideologues or the price of human capital to be raised, the sponsors being mostly financial speculators, who, for the extraction and forecasting of certain resources and raw materials (in this case, the behaviors of users), use means of production based on digital machines that serve the profitable behavior modification of customers, which in turn cannot be obtained without the total control of drivers, so that today they are also tracked by trace-reading machines on Facebook, for example.

On the platforms' webpages, where service providers and their customers can interact, the platforms assign their service providers a specific set of assets to be continuously evaluated, which the service providers in turn must combine, move and manage as part of their "reputational capital." Some theorists see the management of reputational capital as the main resource that the driving actors have to manage and cultivate in order to rise in the hierarchy or simply to survive. Eventually, service providers such as drivers or couriers will have to manage a Facebook hyperpage themselves, documenting the various recommendations from friends, mentors, lenders, sponsors, customers and service providers. It is these open profile portfolios, designed by algorithms, that allow a person's attractiveness and trustworthiness to be displayed, their reputational value to be determined, and thus their ability for a job, line of credit, or partnership to be displayed. Obviously, private asset managers must now speculate on their own "reputational capital" or they must follow the speculations of others, but they are also seduced or guided to do so down to their most secret desires by being subjected to complex yet elusive behavior modification machines, that is, algorithms or automated protocols operating in the black box that seek to direct not only work behavior but even still the spread of emotions across platforms. (zuboff)

If it finally comes to the point that the time of work and the time of non-work are no longer separated by any exact boundary, then there is also no longer any essential difference between employment and non-employment. Therefore Paolo Virno can write in all exaggeration: "Unemployment is unpaid work; work is then in its turn paid unemployment. With good reason, then, it is just as easy to say that one never stops working as it is to say that less and less is being worked." Paolo Virno thus points to the fact that the customer of the "Modern Service in the Labor Market" has long since already corresponded to the subject dubbed by Günther Anders as the "automation servant" or the "labor mannequin" described by Baudrillard, who simulates the non-existent work as if it were there, or acts as if it were not there at all, despite the excess of work. A widespread form of employment today that is wholly integrated into machine complexes is that of the employment mannequin, which performs the activity of waiting or pressing keys in specific cycles that occur in response to a sequence programmed elsewhere by a machine feedback system. Thus, the agility, cleverness, and speed of today's dividend, a Prozac and Ritalin mutant, consists in many cases in the knock-down waiting, in the waiting to be allowed to press the red button, while elsewhere the decision has long since expired or fallen, namely in the recursive loops of the machinic system itself. If there is no outside to employment,

to enterprise, then there is no such thing as work and pleasure, fatigue and rest. Employment becomes personal, and the personal is already the job. In this sense, the suppression of a limited work space, coupled with the development of newer technologies, has definitely changed the way we make references to our bodies and that of others. The insertion of labor into the personal sphere constitutes not only a modification of the economic logic, or a transformation of the order of the symbolic, but an affective transformation of the body.

In fact, labour fiction in this sense is no longer somewhere, and it is everywhere, in the circulation of models, here and now, in the axiomatics even of environmental simulation. It can, as Baudrillard says, appear out of nowhere, simply by the inertia of this operative world. "What science-fiction author would have "imagined" (but no longer "imagined") this "reality" of the West German simultaneous factoriesimagined"), factories which re-employ the unemployed in all roles and at all points of the traditional labor process, but which produce nothing, whose entire activity is activity is exhausted in a game of orders, competition, bookings and accounting, from one factory to another, within a vast network? The entire material production doubles in a vacuum (one of these bogus factories has even "really" gone bankrupt and poached its own unemployed a second time). This is the simulation, not that these factories are fake, but that they are real, hyperreal, and that they thereby all the "real" production, that of the "serious" factories, into the same hyperreality. back into the same hyperreality. What is fascinating here is not the contrast between real and fakefactories, but on the contrary the indistinguishability of the two, the fact that the entire the fact that all the rest of production has no more reference or deeper purpose than this"fake enterprise." It is this hyper-realistic indifference that reveals the true "science-Fiction" quality of this episode. And you can see that you don't have to invent it: it's simply there, emerged from a world without secrets and without depth." Baudrillard

This kind of abysmal desolation (of employment) strangely requires a whole set of conditions regarding reward and control, be it the individual keeping of time accounts, the logging of the length of phone calls, the meticulous recording of meeting, or the detailed study of compliance, sustainability, and control compendiums, all in all methods that only reinforce the rush at work. There are the ADHD-producing activities where the time office workers have to deal with various tasks is notoriously interrupted by communication qua phone, fax, email, and the times of these interruptions are often longer than those of task completion. The interruption, due to the rhythm of information flows in communication networks, partially suspends the time of task processing. Moreover, with the ubiquity of the propaganda of work comes the colonization of weekends, late evenings, even dreams, until eventually workers not only have a job or perform a job, but are the job itself.

As the new management methods, with their proliferating neo-Buddhist semantics, constantly place the word "performance" at the center of their strategies, the distinction between performance, casting, and pure bragging rights, which may well be a measure of self-modification, seems to tend to disappear for employees. The decisive factor is no longer the product or the quality of the work alone, but the performance added as a supplement, in which

one is allowed to play all possible roles, from ethicist to villain; the performance must only not go too far and harm the company, because then one earns a reprimand. Performance, in turn, must be assigned a profile that shows the potentials that make up an employee's (alleged) specialness, which is systematically simulated and ultimately even demanded in the company. This pseudo-difference that makes a difference is firmly inscribed in the operational system.

Other-singularization and self-singularization interlock like a perfectly functioning zipper.

(Reckwitz 341) It is precisely this tension, which pushes performance activities to a razor's edge, that leads not only to non-linear phases of career making, which can be influenced to a certain extent by networking potential, profile enhancement, matching and competencies, but also to the universally feared career stress, which thrives on fear, that one's own performance, which is to be treated like "capital," might not correspond to the supplementary performance (or vice versa), so that one ultimately feels compelled to equate one's own performance with the performance, which in turn means that the presentation of the tasks is added to the tiresome completion of the tasks. This generalized performativity, which is closely welded to the ideal of creative work and incessantly propagates self-invention and self-improvement at the same time, creates the functional psychopath in the case of success, who encloses the subject afflicted with ADHD, and in the case of failure, the depressive subject unfolds. In addition, the acceleration of the exchange of information often enough generates further pathologies, because the employees in the offices are often simply not able to process the immense and constantly increasing amounts of information that invade the brains like voracious parasites via the computers, smartphones, screens and electronic diaries. People react to this by further accelerating communication, working as quickly as they can on solutions, and if something doesn't work out, the best thing to do, according to the coaches' script, is to relax for a few minutes in the small, pseudo-exotic and warm-hearted feel-good oases of the offices under artificial palm trees or run a lap on the treadmill in the company's fitness room.

That employees are additionally busy training themselves in the readymades of neo-Buddhist-inspired coaching discourses and other soft skills in order to create something like a community of socially competent and at the same time demanding self-activity and personal responsibility, especially in the office, where, beyond the restraints of the factory system, wage labor continues to be the defining principle, that really makes you sit up and take notice, because a polite tone or a short tactical conversation, which is repugnant to any tendency toward "you" or over-communication, has long since ceased to be sufficient to facilitate cooperation in the office under conditions that are truly not of one's own choosing. For a long time now, large companies have been using data software that processes and predicts the behavior of their own employees by searching the Internet for their data traces. Thereupon, the machine learning models of certain software companies assign the company's employees to a risk index, and the predictions made on this basis about the employees' behavior are supposed to be identical in the best case to the personnel fluctuations that actually take place. Thus, by purchasing the information and prediction products about its own employees, the company's management can intervene preventively, if it has an active human resources policy. But this is only the machine-objective side of the game, to which the subjective constitution of the employees must be added.

Skillful surfing on the waves of employment requires perseverance and suppleness in the mode

of auto-operational agility for employees, in order to immediately perceive surprising options in the job or to execute quick decisions in order to take on new tasks quasi abruptly; it requires playful opportunism as a maxim for action, with which one always keeps oneself open to a multitude of possibilities in order to take the best one that presents itself at the moment, or to drop an option, without hesitation, in favor of a better opportunity; thus, this kind of performative surfing commands the formulation of a cynical interest with which, often enough, the same eliminations that others make are defamed as regrettable but nevertheless unavoidable deformations. This form of employment corresponds to a volatile subjectivity that is extended to the limits of mobility, especially digital mobility, in order to be able to reap every affective and monetary surplus. In this context, Bernhard Stiegler extremely sharply criticizes a prevailing mentality today (of the functional psychopath), which he describes as “I-don’t-give-a-fuckism,” a general attitude of organized irresponsibility. And the more intensively the employees of a company expose themselves to the company rules, programs and dispositives on the basis of a temporary, but at the same time unrestricted consent, and at the same time make use of them – including the cybernetic feedback mechanisms, which no stupid state of mind with its organs and apparatuses of surveillance and control could ever invent, because there is actually no current need for ultra-harsh research, spying and imprisonment of agents of discontent (and yet this surveillance takes place preventively) – the more the range of variation of individual options and performance in the operational field shimmers out. Thus, nowadays, office workers remain committed to the half-hearted yet dutiful involvement in everyday office life precisely because of their agonizing opportunism, which tries to exploit even the slightest advantage, at all times, without there necessarily having to be any hard and fast work instructions, and this takes place within the framework of an operative control and optimization of one’s own person, which in turn presupposes or requires, in the best case, 100% identification with the company’s goals. In this, the nevertheless rather murmuring community of company employees takes over the business of a therapeutic, secondary control, which flanks and completes the primary control of the wage worker and the precarious, which is orchestrated by the capitalist economy.

It is not, after all, that office workers are immediately visibly subject to the terrorizing command of a central office; instead, they are embedded in flexible technological control systems and horizontal group dispositifs that keep both their own effectiveness, status, professional and emotional competencies, and operational tasks, as well as those of other workers, partially available on screens at all times. Being “online” condenses the hegemonic form of work and life; constantly mobile and mobilizable availability in the context of flexible normalization is the work itself, which employees additionally train themselves to do by consuming worlds of experience, wellness and fitness programs, until they incorporate employment quasi-frictionlessly in the course of a permanent recursion with the machines. By means of microtechnologies, laptops and smartphones, which are usually operated in a seated position, employees are constantly incorporated, following a modular logic, into those streams of information that circulate in corporate networks. Unceasingly mobilizable and potentially available around the clock, employees remain mentally stimulated to react excitedly in real time during working hours to the fluctuations of the information flows that constantly flicker across their screens. Within the framework of techno-scientific and psychologistic dispositions, programming and construction

principles, there is hardly a workplace today that is not permanently put to evaluation and at the same time not scrutinized for the creative potential and performance ability of dividers and project groups, only to be evaluated again, i.e., examined for new performance potentials, but this is less due to the totalitarian pressure of a leader; rather, the evaluation usually remains integrated into the team; and there is no team that does not demand debates, speeches and agreements qua anglicized language games that Wittgenstein would not have dreamed of in his sleep. In the middle of the team, however, there is the leader, who, for example, almost enthusiastically comments on a PowerPoint presentation in a kind of action art, so that everyone can get a picture of the company, the product or the project. Of course, the leader does not wear a tie, and the company logo shines at heart level on his casual, open, white casual shirt. The gray hair with white streaks and the small snake tattoo on the back of his neck, however, also betray a very small amount of individualism, which, when it comes down to it, is put entirely at the service of team spirit. As in soccer, one supposedly only wants to help the team. This situation is perpetuated right down to the very tips of the company's hair, when contemporary bosses act emphatically relaxed, virtually force the "you" on their employees, and notoriously claim that their companies have a wonderfully flat hierarchy and a wellness atmosphere that can almost be interpreted as cosmological, while in the same breath the bosses mob their employees, often cut them off from information flows out of pure harassment, overwhelm them with work that makes them ill, or chase them through the various departments. Instead of proceeding strategically as in the past, the task of managers today is to reduce the error-proneness and slowness of human decision-making compared to algorithmically run processes, just to keep the algorithmic technocracy running. In doing so, managers are themselves completely deskilled to act as ruthless corporate enforcers and social police within the organization itself. They give no direction and have no explanation for the direction the company is taking, are highly flexible, offensive and defensive at the same time, bullying, exhilarating and hurtful, focused and seemingly insecure, that is, clever, and ultimately they are limited to reflecting the imperatives of the shareholder value system and meticulously following the guidelines, spurring on the employees, but also giving them a piece of their mind from time to time, all within the framework of creative teamwork and for the good of the team, of course. Those who are good at getting rid of wimps have a future today.

The performance of the employees and their valorization is not at all aimed at the devaluation of the average, as Reckwitz assumes, but the average is now aligned with its own amplitudes, which are configured by the team, the leader and the respective project on which one is currently working. By trying to focus primarily on reinforcing competencies and skills of employees, as well as enthusiasm for new tasks, for a soft-spoken tolerance and tactical friendship, for opportunism and quick-wittedness, the ability to present oneself in and in front of the team, leaders can sell the whole thing as potency. The project-oriented employee, who can present his ego gloriously on the stage of the office in fundamental casting, even if the obsessive search for the ego turns out to be the search for a ghost, perhaps still for a virtual ego that is strangely congruent with the adaptable subject, can only follow the narrative of casting if coaching and casting are mutually dependent.

The ethos, which is composed of opportunism, creativity, and social commitment and is

articulated in Heideggerian terms as talk or in system German terms as singularity play or communication, an ethos about which every job application event today provides sufficient information, is constantly renegotiated or balanced without a coach, who in his function as a management consultant is more like a postmodern itinerant preacher, constantly having to explicitly recommend it. Nevertheless, the coach in his special kind of clown remains a not unimportant figure, next to whom sometimes even the manager pales as the remixer or DJ of postindustrial production. Seeßlen 97 Within the framework of the demanded and willingly also carried out and above all very operative-talking, creation-crazed and performance-saturated forced harmonization, a battle of all against all is waged with the help of a pseudo-sadism, that is, secret mutual contempt as well as the paradoxical interest in active passivity, which results in the intensification of resentment as well as experience, which after all no longer knows any reference in talk, in the process of a public segregation of opinion. In the office, all levels of sociable exchange are tried out, from games that promote community and at the same time tickle out the individual's will to perform, the notoriously flat hierarchies and the mixing of work and leisure, to the promotion of competition, the berating of failures and the monitoring of everyone by everyone, to the joint consumption of performance-enhancing drugs, amphetamines and vitamins. But in the end, everyone is out for themselves. "The clever one," writes Wolfgang Pohrt, "is the one who knows how to win them (the others) over or trick them. Those who don't understand are the stupid ones."

The absolute automaton is shifting the world of work from manpower to brainpower. Just as there was a coupling of hand and machine at the beginning of industrialization, today the brain and the machine are being coupled in a new economy that Stiegler calls "Iconomy." This transformation involves a transductive relation, whereby production is no longer based on labor time but on machine time. Already with the coupling of hand and machine, it is the latter that really works, and it does so blindly and automatically, which means that this process can hardly be described as work anymore, insofar as it always contains an opening, whereas serial and automated production is always completed. In this respect, the products are then ready-made goods.

The question today is whether the (alleged) escalation of productivity achieved with automated production should result in free time or in liberated labor. If automation liberates time in general, how do we avoid that this liberated and thus available time becomes an available brain time, a time that is no longer tied to Television but to Google, Amazon and Facebook. Social media networks create a reality that is real, but as a technology of immediacy, you can't get satisfaction, even though we love them precisely because of their separation from now-time. They are social drugs for those who want the humane, located somewhere in time and space. It is the pseudo-other that users connect with, not the radical other or the stranger or even real other. We work off weakness and vagueness to advance the exhibition of self, but no matter how stylish, aggressive, desperate, or diplomatic the promotion of self on dominant media platforms, it remains part of the logic of media: the message is the void.

Liberated time must be liberated work, not abstracting from energy and its potential; hand, brain and energy must be connected. Today it looks quite different. Maurizio Lazzarato writes: "In order to guarantee growing revenues for financial investors, availability must be total for precarious and

deficient employment as well as for poorly compensated unemployment, for austerity as well as for “reforms.” To refuse work today is to deny this availability, which financialization would like to have, without limits or quid pro quo. To practice the refusal of labor in the conditions of contemporary exploitation means to invent new modalities of struggle and organization, not only to preserve the inherited rights of the historical struggles against wage labor, but also and above all to assert new rights, adapted to the new modalities of the exploitation of time, to construct forms of solidarity capable of preventing the expropriation of knowledge and savoir-faire, and to avoid the modalities of production being dictated by the requirements of financial valorization, which neither art nor cultural industries can escape. ” It is necessary to look again outside the intolerable system of employment for activities in the Marxian sense that create sustainable wealth and abolish wage labor in favor of knowledge, which today is entirely materialized in machines, but of a transformed knowledge, insofar as time is liberated precisely through the work of de-automation, in order to achieve a free time of transindividuation, in the sense of otium or sholhe, a leisure, new techniques of self and other, and that is to work for oneself and through the other. This requires an organological revolution, the invention of new instruments of knowledge and publication, an epistemic and epistemological revolution, and this then precisely cannot be reduced to the expansion of the service sector or the creation of new jobs or to a minimal basic income that remains subject to capitalization, the market and money. Wealth is time and time must also be available for interruptions because it provides the quantum leap for psychic and social individuations, which in turn are formed and metastabilized by transindividuations. This time of interruptions is important to invent a new form of work, different from entropy and promoting negentropy, an energieia, a passage towards action, where energies such as fossil energy can only ever be a condition for neotic energy, not this energy itself.

translated by deepL.

[<](#) [PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT](#) [→](#)

META

CONTACT

FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX

IMPRESSUM

DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

TAXONOMY

CATEGORIES

TAGS

AUTHORS

ALL INPUT

SOCIAL

FACEBOOK

INSTAGRAM

TWITTER